

May 4, 1968

Hi Marge:

Thanks for your lovely last. It is much appreciated. As our time draws near (I don't know, this sounds like a pregnancy or an execution, I think) we are getting less and less mail. We said we'd be away a year and nothing we could do to alter that statement worked; the world has now shut us off - we have had our year and that must be it. However, we have a few more weeks, although the value of same will be reduced somewhat by the dilution of packing, worrying about packing, anticipating the Italian red tape, the talking about it, the overness of something - you know our trip, like the rest of us, was young and promising once and now it is old and dying and it is very sad. But of course there is much to look forward to also: I will never trade our forests for this rich but arid looking land, and it will be good to get back to bird photography (although I have taken a few tele shots of the cliff swallows of Taormina (Rondine, they make these wasp like nests under the balconies and, while they are of a different color, black and white, they swoop and twitter and construct the same); it will be good to wander once again through a second hand book store looking for a Hemingway or some other book of the late 20's and early 30's (my period) and of course it will be good to get back to my house and be surrounded by my books and ritualistic working equipment. At least it is the lack of these last which I phonily present myself with as the reason for my very faint productivity.

We leave on the ~~Santhamian~~ Anna Marie of the Greek Line on May 27, as I think I have told you, touching Naples, Palermo and Halifax before debarking at New York.....The weather in all Italy is growing warm and inviting at long last and lunch is always eaten outside at the Panoramica. Oh yes, I must get over this quaint Italian bit of primo and secondo, spaghetti, let us usually say, and then usually pollo gambe if it is cooked that day and of course always vino bianco locale. One can get quite a pleasant glow on in the middle of the day, looking out at Giardini bay, and perhaps an American destroyer on rest leave and the curving shore disappearing into the infinity of haze in the direction of Siracusa and glancing occasionally to the right to see if Etna is there that day, smoking or simply gone behind the sirocco and all the while listening to Charles Mitchell, lost from England; lost from one wife, lost from all mail, a tall handsome, striding pipesmoking man who somehow manages to look decorous with hair blowing. Mitchell claims to be a misogynist, a word which I thought he had missed on just a little bit but which he tells me means hater of marriage - you will have to check this. I have no dictionary. He hates to be married but he dearly loves the idea of companionship and is thinking perhaps of importing someone. Quite an odd bloke. Yesterday it was 2 and the sun was strong when we all came back to our flat and he agreed to buy most of the things Ruth has for sale, especially the sheets. "I say, will you accept a check on the Bank of England?" He has designed and half subsidized an extension on the house he is living in but occasionally suffers from claustrophobia thinking that he will have to stay here three and a half years to get his money back. Likes to talk about lemmings and that sort of thing, old chap, and on the subject of old dogs, really, my good fellow, one cannot get too involved; I had to shoot mine, the old fellow got feeble in the head as well as the legs and would stand there trembling and barking and feeling hurt if my hand wasn't on him. It's really a run go." Well enough of this. More stamps for your young chap; Best,